



Wiktionary

Dictionaries

Every living, written language needs to have a dictionary, and it needs to have a living literature in production, and readers of that literature.

The vital question of the literature and the readership of the literature in a given language is one that we will return to, towards the end of this course.

The dictionary serves the literature. The dictionary we are referring to is the kind that PanSALB calls a “monolingual explanatory dictionary”, so as to distinguish it from bilingual dictionaries, which serve the purpose of translation from one language to another. Such dictionaries are invariably in two halves, e.g. Khosa-English/English-Xhosa.

We will return to the important question of translation in the next part. Let it suffice for now to note that the existence of translation dictionaries is a double-edged sword. On the one side it brings a language into cognisance by different language speakers, and so makes it accessible to more readers and speakers. But on the other side, bilingual dictionaries open the less advantaged language up to domination by the more powerful language. The consequence can be that the intellectuals of an African language-group, for example, can be drawn off into the pool of the other and in particular colonial language, such as English, for example.

Further, the commonality of English (or Afrikaans) as the other language in the bilingual dictionaries of the nine indigenous official languages keeps the colonisers' languages in the position of mediating between the indigenous languages. The publication of, say, a Zulu-Venda/Venda-Zulu dictionary seems a long way away, but until such dictionaries are available, the literary relationship between those two languages will continue to be passed through the cultural filter of English, at least to some extent, to the disadvantage of the two African languages.

The safety of a language cannot be secured by the mere existence of bilingual dictionaries. There has to be a dictionary of the language, in the language itself - the kind that PanSALB calls a "monolingual explanatory dictionary". And it has to be kept up to date with the development of the language, so that it is a transmitter of that development to all the language-speakers, writers and readers.

In a later part of this course we will look at the example of Kiswahili, at its outstanding success as an international language, and at the history of Kiswahili-Kiswahili dictionaries, which several generations ago superseded the bilingual translation dictionaries that the Christian missionaries had originally created.

PanSALB outsourced its central task

The case for the creation of a monolingual explanatory dictionary for each of the nine indigenous official languages is incontrovertible. If these languages are to survive, it must be done, and done quickly. Therefore it is PanSALB's job. PanSALB has outsourced this job to nine "National Lexicography Units" (NLUs) located in academic institutions. These are "Section 29" not-for-profit companies, dispersed around the country, and there is no trace of their names and contact details on the PanSALB web site.

More to the point, **there are no (monolingual) dictionaries**. None. There are rumours of a Zulu one, and rumours of a Venda one, but so far, no reference, name, publisher, vendor, price, or anything. All information to the contrary will be gratefully received by the Communist University.

Why Wiktionary?

Dictionaries are registers of words in use. The only source of words in use is the users, who are the speakers, writers and readers of the language.

It follows that the creation of a dictionary has to be a mass project, which cannot in practice be effected by obscure and little-known initiatives such as PanSALB's "NLUs".

[Wiktionary](#) is an existing Internet structure that is available, free, to anyone wanting to enter a mass, collaborative project to compile a dictionary in any language.

Wiktionary is a well-organised form of “crowdsourcing”. The [Wikipedia entry on crowdsourcing](#) in fact describes dictionary-compilation as a classical form of crowdsourcing. For example, it says:

“The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) (OED) may provide one of the earliest examples of [crowdsourcing](#). An open call was made to the community for contributions by volunteers to identify all words in the English language and provide example quotations of their usages for each one. They received over 6 million submissions over a period of 70 years.”

Wiktionaries of South African languages already exist. They are listed in this table:

NLU	Wiktionary URL
Zulu	http://zu.wiktionary.org/wiki/Ikhasi_Elikhulu
Xhosa	http://xh.wiktionary.org/wiki/Iphepha_Elingundoqo
Afrikaans	http://af.wiktionary.org/wiki/Tuisblad
English	http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/
Northern Sotho	No wiktionary yet [start one]
Tswana	http://tn.wiktionary.org/wiki/Tsebe_ya_konokono
Sotho	http://st.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page
Tsonga	http://ts.wiktionary.org/wiki/Tlukankulu
Swati	http://ss.wiktionary.org/wiki/Likhasi_Lelikhulu
Venda	No wiktionary yet [start one]
Ndebele	No wiktionary yet [start one]

So why is PanSALB not promoting these Wiktionary projects?

Wiktionary is part of the family of collaborative projects that includes Wikipedia, which is one of the most-visited sites in the whole world. All of these projects are created by, and maintained by volunteers.

With a Wiktionary project, the dictionary is being published as it is being created. Users can have the benefit of the work, long before it is ready for publication in

hard-copy form (if that form is even considered necessary). I may actually prove very difficult to publish hard-copy dictionaries, even if there is a will. The languages should not be held hostage for the sake of this semi-obsolete form of publication, as desirable as it may be to have such hard-copy works.

The Communist University would like to hear from anyone who has been assisting in the compilation of South African-language Wiktionaries.



<http://translate.google.com/>

Google Translate

Google translate will translate text from and to the following languages:

From: Detect language ▾		↔		To: Afrikaans ▾		Translate	
Detect language	Catalan	Finnish	Hungarian	Latin	Romanian	Turkish	
Afrikaans	Cebuano	French	Icelandic	Latvian	Russian	Ukrainian	
Albanian	Chinese	Galician	Indonesian	Lithuanian	Serbian	Urdu	
Arabic	Croatian	Georgian	Irish	Macedonian	Slovak	Vietnamese	
Armenian	Czech	German	Italian	Malay	Slovenian	Welsh	
Azerbaijani	Danish	Greek	Japanese	Maltese	Spanish	Yiddish	
Basque	Dutch	Gujarati	Javanese	Marathi	Swahili		
Belarusian	English	Haitian Creole	Kannada	Norwegian	Swedish		
Bengali	Esperanto	Hebrew	Khmer	Persian	Tamil		
Bosnian	Estonian	Hindi	Korean	Polish	Telugu		
Bulgarian	Filipino	Hmong	Lao	Portuguese	Thai		

These languages are 71 in number, and they include only one indigenous African language: Swahili.

The advent of free, online, automatic translation services is a great boon and a help to people a lot of the time. In a continent where hundreds of languages are spoken, it opens the prospect of people being able to communicate much better than before across language barriers, if they have written text.

But none of this is possible if only one African language is available.

The absence of indigenous African languages works in an opposite way. It means, at this stage, that the selected languages are even more privileged than before. The playing field, up to now, is not more, but less even.

Machine translation

Computer translation is a great assistance, but it is not perfect. Computer translation has to be corrected, because it always contains errors, and serious errors at that.

Computer translation is an assistance, because it quickly gives you a draft to work on.

To correct, you must apply your own knowledge or use an old-fashioned dictionary, or the computer equivalent of an old-fashioned dictionary. Beyond that, too, translation is an art. South Africans have not come to terms with translation, yet. This is not only true in terms of the eleven languages and other languages spoken in South Africa, but also in terms of international languages.

This becomes at some point a political problem.



MS-Office Translate

In MS-Office, in Word, under “Review”, the above icon can be found with the word “Translate” under it.

Clicking it leads you into a process of translation of your document. This is done via the Internet, through the browser Internet Explorer, which must be available on your computer.

The controls appear in a panel on the right of your screen. You choose from drop-down menus which language you want to translate from and to. When you click “Translate the whole document”, the browser opens and you will soon have a translation.

The number of languages it offers is less than Google, and it does not include any indigenous African languages at all.

It is an effective instrument for translating from French to English, and vice-versa. As such, it is a help to Africans.

But this Internet translator is another example of the regrettable dominance of the same dominant languages, even with this tool that is capable of redressing the balance.

It may be that government action would be required, say in the form of subsidy to service providers or academics, so that automatic translation services in and between all of our South African official languages is made available.

But the history of PanSALB does not encourage an expectation that this could happen easily, or soon.

— Selected Marxist Writers —

English	AR	HY	BN	ZH	CA	CS	DA	DE	EL	ES	EU	FA	FI	FR	HE	HU	ID	IT	JA	KO	KU	MK	NL	NO	PL	PT	RO	RU	SI	SK	SL	SR	SV	TH	TL	TR	UR	VI
Marx-Eng.	●	HY	BN	ZH	●	CS	DA	●	EL	●	EU	●	FI	●	HE	HU	ID	●	JA	KO	KU	MK	●	NO	PL	●	RO	RU	SI	SK	SL	SR	●	TH		TR	UR	VI
De Leon					●					●				●									●			●	RO						●					
Lafargue					●			●		●				●									●			●	RO							●				
Kautsky								●				●		●								MK	●			●	●							●				
Plekhanov		HY						●				●		●			ID						●			●		RU			SL	SR	●					
Zetkin								●				●		●									●															
Connolly					●																			NO														
Luxemburg	●	HY		ZH	●		DA	●	EL	●	EU	●	FI	●		HU	ID	●	JA			MK	●	NO	PL	●		RU				SR	●			TR		
Lenin	●	HY	BN	ZH	●		DA	●	EL	●	EU	●	FI	●			ID	●	JA		KU	MK	●	NO	PL	●	RO	RU	SI	SK	SL	SR	●	TH	TL	TR	UR	VI
Trotsky	●	HY	BN	ZH	●	CS	DA	●	EL	●	EU	●	FI	●	HE	HU	ID	●	JA	KO	KU		●	NO	PL	●	RO	RU			SL	SR	●	TH	TL	TR	UR	VI
Kollontai					●							●		●		HU	ID						●				●						●	TH				
Bukharin				ZH				●	EL	●		●	FI	●				●								●							●					
Gramsci				ZH	●		DA			●		●	FI	●		HU		●				MK				●	●					SR		TH				
Lukacs								●					●	●		HU		●					●			●						SR	●			UR		
Korsch					●			●				●		●									●			●							●					
MN Roy														●																								
Mariátegui					●					●				●												●												
CLR James					●																																	
Padmore																																						
Mattick					●		DA	●				●														●								●				
Draper					●			●		●		●										MK	●											●				

<http://marxists.org/xlang/index.htm>

MIA Cross-Language

MIA is a large archive of literature in many languages. Its nature allows the MIA operators to create an extra category called “Cross-Language” (X-Lang) so that readers can easily move, for example, between a work in one language to the same work in another language.

What this points to is the possibility of, through the Internet, effectively publishing one work in many languages.

Seeing the way that the requirement for publication in all official languages is handled (e.g. by the SA [National Planning Commission](#)) in South Africa, it is clear that there is no standard. The way the NDP is published is in full in English, with Mickey Mouse versions for everybody other than English-speakers.

Probably the best option is for each column in a South African “X-Lang” table, representing one of the languages, to be edited by separate agencies accountable to their language groups.

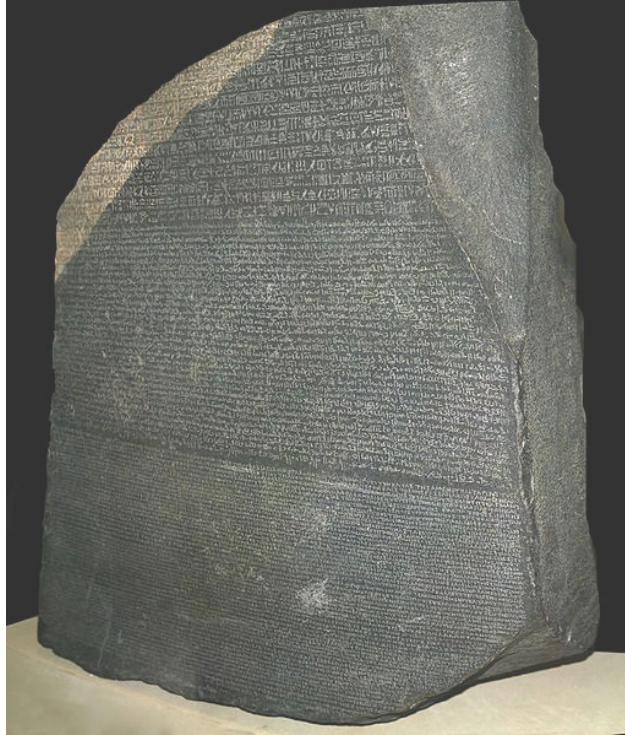
So, for example, if the a document like the NDP is not published in any given SA official language, then an agency responsible for that language would have the resources to go ahead and make and publish a translation.

X-Lang in Political Education

Language is an issue when it comes to political education. The above diagram can show how it will be possible to compile parallel material for the Communist University, for example, in all of the official languages, and to run the Communist University as a simultaneous multi-lingual provider of political-education reading material for discussion.

What a pleasure it will be to sit in a study circle, having a discussion in Zulu, Pedi, Sotho or Xhosa, about Marx or Lenin or Agitprop, or about African Revolutionary Writers

Language is a revolutionary issue.



The Rosetta Stone: One text, three languages

Salama

An example

Hugh Tweedie has contributed the following link:

<http://www.njas.helsinki.fi/salama/index.html>

This web site appears to present an automatic generator of dictionaries, which would in principle be a good thing, and a very good thing.

But it is not very clear as to whether these are what it calls “monolingual” dictionaries (i.e. proper dictionaries that define words in the language itself), or whether they are dictionaries which are definitions of words in English. If the latter is the case, then one would want to look elsewhere, because the mediation of languages via English translation is not what we want in the post-colonial time.

This would seem to be confirmed on the Salama web site under “dictionary compilation” where it says:

“Application to other languages

“The system can currently be applied to the compilation of dictionaries between Swahili and any other language, provided that a conversion dictionary between English and the target language is available. Using an electronic conversion dictionary, most of the English glosses can be converted into the target language. Manual editing is needed for checking and correcting the result, because only part of lexical data can be converted in this way.”

The English language therefore becomes the medium and the yardstick of the other language. This is not what we want.



St. Jerome, translator of the Bible into Latin

Course: Languages

26002, Introductions to Parts 3 and 4

1902 words